



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Tuesday, 9th May 2023 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- David Ball (DB)
- Hamnah Baig (HB)
- Sarah Fuell (SF)
- Ahmer Ilyas (AI)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Md Sajal (MS)
- Aman Tripathi (AT)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Bob Walder, *incoming Chair of Trustee Board, HSU* (BW)
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Sean Ferrie, *Head of Operations, HSU* (SFe)
- Steve Owen, *Head of Student Services, HSU* (SO)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)

1. Apologies for absence

- Steve Isaacs
- Leena Patel
- Osama Siddiqui

Non-Attendance

None

Welcome

DB welcomed BW to the meeting as an Observer. BW will be taking up the role of Chair of the HSU Trustee Board from September 2023 on DB's retirement. DB sincerely thanked him for agreeing to take on the role and said that the Board were very much looking forward to working with him.

2. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meeting, which was held on Wednesday, 8th February 2023.

4. To note: Deputy Chair for meeting

DB reminded the Board that as the current President, HSU, has now left the organisation, this has left the position of Deputy Chair of the Trustee Board vacant. It was therefore decided that the position would rotate amongst the three Vice-Presidents, if required, and as such, at today's meeting, MS will serve as Deputy Chair.

5. CEO Update

The Board received the update from the CEO. RH highlighted the following:

- Cost of living. Student hardship funding has now been agreed in principle for the 2023/24 academic year. A more permanent structure for hardship funding has now been put in place representing inflationary growth of 5% on this year and 10% growth in student numbers. New funding levels will top £1.4m.
- Advice and Support Centre. There has been a slight decrease in students using the Centre over the past month, driven by a capacity issue resulting from a staff vacancy. The person has now been replaced and service usage numbers are successfully tracking against previous years again.
- Working as Chair of the Southern SUs regional Student Voice Community of Practice, SO led a group of Unions who compiled a response to the Office for Students Consultation on Sexual Violence and Misconduct. It is proposed that further education on consent, resources and reporting mechanisms for students be made mandatory for universities.
- Work is underway on the Summer Ball. It is anticipated that the event will make a £20k loss but RH asked the Board to note that the forecast accommodates this loss. UM asked if this was the first time the event had made a loss. RH said that it had also made a similar loss in 2022 but it has always been run as a breakeven event, never run to be profitable. SFe reported that currently 1,100 tickets had been sold, with the team hoping to increase this to 1,300. A review of the viability of the event will take place over the summer and proposals for alternatives will be considered in terms of student profile, team resources and site capacity.
- Elections feedback will form part of a discussion later in today's meeting.
- UM asked why auto-enrolment had only been directed towards undergraduate and postgraduate students studying BSc/MSc Computer Science into the Computer Science Society. RH replied that this is a pilot programme within one of the larger Schools, with a more engaged cohort and a better developed Academic Society. HSU are working towards the removal of barriers to joining Societies across the university, as well as fostering a broader sense of community between staff and students, for example through events and activities such as an end-of-year social. If successful, it is something that HSU will look to roll-out elsewhere.

6. March Management Accounts

The Board received the Management Accounts for April. RH highlighted the following:

- As previously spoken, the loss associated with the Summer Ball is reflected in the forecast.
- Commercial activity performed well against budget.
- There is some overspend in Student Events and Student Development but this is due to phasing issues and levels out across the year.

- For the month, the reduction in the Accommodation Grant of £8,742 has been matched by a reduction in the Lease Costs at the Forum so the variance is zero. This is due to HSU now occupying a smaller square footage in the Forum than when the Budget was prepared.
- A small surplus of £19,955 is forecast against budget of £18,288 for the year.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RH noted that compared to peer Unions across the sector, HSU is in a positive position commercially which is testament to the team's hard work. DB said that this was very much a reflection of the discussions with UH, over previous years, about commercial activity cross-campus, all of which now seemed to be 'paying off'. MW noted that the university is still seeing a reduced footfall on campus, allied to a continuing readjustment to a post-Covid landscape.
- HB asked for clarity in respect of the UH Revenue Share. RH noted that built into the lease of the Forum was an agreement that HSU pay 1% of any income generated to UH. She further noted that HSU are retaining some exceptional/extra income (promoter income and Covid grant recovery money) which will be required to be released in due course. DB said that this was in line with the strategy of building up Reserves. He noted that this is very much a balancing act however; HSU, as a membership charity, does not want to make profit but equally, the organisation needs security for the long-term and the unexpected.
- DB asked for the Board's thanks to be passed back to the Finance Team for their usual hard work and endeavours.

7. Sabbatical Officer report

The Board received the Sabbatical Officer report. DB noted OS's absence from today's meeting and asked for any queries to be emailed to him, for OS to respond to in due course.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- DB thanked both AT and MS for their hard work on so many different projects, during an incredibly busy period.
- In response to DB, AT said that additional financial support and a possible further extension, beyond the current one-month extension granted by the Finance Team, are being explored for those Nigerian students affected by ongoing local political issues in Nigeria. UM asked that a further update on this issue be provided to the Board at the next meeting.

AT

8. University update

MW updated the Board on the current opportunities and challenges facing UH:

- Bank Holidays. MW noted the impact of three Monday Bank Holidays in the month.
- Industrial Action. The University and College (UCU) have announced that following a re-ballot of their members and achieving a mandate, they will be undertaking further industrial action, with the new mandate expiring on 30th September 2023. From Thursday, 20th April, UCU have asked their members to participate in continuous action short of strike. As ever, UH is putting in place a series of measures to limit the impact on students, and to staff and the wider community.

- Assessment period. MW noted far fewer exams this year than previously. This approach will pass into UH's Policies and Regulations for the new academic year, to stipulate that exams are only to be permitted where there is a professional body requirement or where they are seen to be the best pedagogical approach to assessment for a particular subject. Using a greater range of assessments has a positive impact on student performance. MW said, however, this was a challenge in the context of the development of AI tools but reiterated that, as previously reported, an expert group within UH are considering different ways for the university to keep pace and to accommodate the technology.
- Appointments. MW advised that a new Director of Learning and Teaching, to take leadership of the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre (LTIC), has been appointed, along with a new Head of Academic Skills Development, leading a new team within LTIC to develop and implement a new approach to academic skills development across UH.
- New academic year. MW noted the uncertainty externally on the level of awards at A-level and BTec that will be made this year. She noted UH is working to ensure its level of offer remains ambitious, with decisions made at programme level.
- Events. MW noted a raft of upcoming events through the summer period including: SU Awards; launch of the UH Powering Impact Report 2023, which reports on the economic and social impact of the university over the last five years; Sports Awards; Creative Arts Degree Show; Vice Chancellor's Awards. She also highlighted a variety of conferences and awaydays, centring on strategy, which will take place over the same period.

As ever, DB thanked MW for her valuable and informative update and said that HSU, are of course always ready and willing contributors to projects where required.

9. Elections update

The Board received a presentation in respect of the completed Elections cycle and revised process. RH and SO highlighted the following:

- 5,129 students cast more than 21,000 individual votes which is 150% more than last year.
- Significant strides have been made in increased diversity of the candidate pool, significantly increased student engagement with the process, a broader base of schools presented, a solidified pathway for School of Community Organisers, an increased diversity of issues and ideas brought forward in manifestos, and a significantly reduced number of complaints.
- Areas to develop include exploring the diversity of the candidate pool further as it has not translated to voting figures. In addition, although more diverse than in years past, the successfully elected team does still not fully reflect the array of students at UH and the Disabled Students' Officer post remains unfilled. A bye-election will run in October for this position.
- Officers for the new year are as follows:
 - President - Manoj Kumar Nagireddy (HBS)
 - Campus-Based Officer – Md Sajal (SPECS)
 - Commuting Students Officer - Olawale Joshua Komolafe (HBS)
 - International Students' Officer - Padmavathi Valluri (HBS)
 - LGBTQ+ Students' Officer - Chinmay Vyas (SHE)
 - Mature Students' Officer - Chizi Ezechukwu (LMS)
 - Placement Students' Officer - Moyinoluwa Ifeoluwa Olaiya (HBS)
 - Women Students' Officer - Divya Maheshwaram (HBS)
- Work has now begun in terms of considering training and induction which will be developed through the Remunerations and Appointments Committee.

- A placement student is being recruited to provide administrative and organisational support for the team.
- Projects will be finalised over the summer in consultation with Officers the staff team.
- RH to circulate presentation.

RH

On behalf of the Board, DB expressed his sincere thanks to the team for their considerable efforts to see this cycle through to fruition, given the requirement to implement the new plans at short notice. He offered his particular thanks to RH for spearheading and leading the project.

DB went on to ask if it was still the plan that, in addition to the President, three other Officers would attend Board meetings on a rotational basis. RH confirmed that this was the case. However, if any Officer prefers not to be part of the Trustee Board, this will be honoured. Conversations will, therefore, take place with the new Officers to see where their thinking is in terms of this. RH also noted that HSU outcomes are being observed across the sector. MW said that the new process had been very well received by UH and RH agreed that the university have indeed been very supportive.

In response to AT, RH said that the new Officer roles had been developed to close the gaps in the demographic of students engaging with the process. However, there does indeed remain a gap in respect of representing undergraduate students. RH also agreed with MS, noting that the Officers are often heavily represented amongst the International student cohort and thus Home student representation is also absent. DB agreed, noting that experience indicates that Home student engagement tends to be less, as well as highlighting that this project is still very much 'work in progress' and will evolve going forward.

HB said that she had very much enjoyed the process. She suggested that there could perhaps be better co-ordination in terms of candidates attending College Lane and De Havilland campuses. RH said that this issue could be worked through with the Timetabling team. DB suggested that a working group be set up to review and work through all such feedback and comments.

10. Strategic Plan discussion

DB reminded the Board that the three-year Strategic Plan for 2020-23 is coming towards its close. A new Plan is therefore required and is being initiated. Today's presentation will review the current strategy, share research and outline next steps. A further presentation at the next meeting will take the form of a substantial debate to move the new Plan forward. RH to circulate today's presentation.

RH

The Board thus received a presentation on Strategic Planning. Highlights included:

- SFe noted that the wider SU team have been engaged in the process as much as possible. There have been a variety of talks and 'Q&A' sessions from UH, as well as external speakers giving insight on the Higher Education landscape, alongside staff awaydays to stimulate the conversation.
- SO shared research and data on expected student numbers, cost of living, term-time locations of students, part-time work and personal commitments for students, and extra-curricular activity.
- RH revisited the current four Strategic Themes: Student Communities; Student Success; Student Insight; and Students' Union. These will be retained as a guiding force.
- RH reported on what areas of the Plan had been successful and discussed some of the issues surrounding KPIs which had been unsuccessful.

- RH took the Board through the next steps to reflect, respond and review.

DB thanked the team and opened the meeting for discussion.

UM thanked the team for the very interesting presentation. He noted that the research shared had highlighted that a number of students feel lonely and isolated on a regular (daily and weekly) basis. He asked how HSU would respond to this challenge. SO said there was some further research to do here to ascertain what demographic is most impacted, in order to understand what projects would be most beneficial. MW said that she feared this was a societal issue and that she was curious to see how this is reflected in the NSS. She said that it was an issue that must be closely tracked and that HSU have a vital part to play. RH said this is very much a sector-wide issue and that she felt that the School community is key. SO concurred, noting that the work around auto-enrolment to School based societies will increase a sense of community. RH went on to say that this is sadly part of the post-Covid landscape, after so much digital interaction by students.

11. Remuneration and Appointments Committee update

DB noted the successful campaign to find a new Chair of the Trustee Board. He also reported that the SI’s term of office as an External Trustee concludes in September and a recruitment process is underway. The Student Trustee vacancy has also been advertised and is in train.

DB highlighted the new Terms of Reference, the renaming of the Committee to People Committee and the revised Membership as outlined in Paper 4. The Board approved the changes unanimously.

12. Finance and Audit Committee update

SF reported that a current opportunity exists to prepay a proportion of the pension deficit and a meeting to explore this will take place imminently. HSU has a 13-year paydown of the deficit which currently accounts for £85/90k a year. DB noted that this position was common across the Higher Education sector. RH said that counterparts in the sector are reporting that there is a significant commercial slowdown which appears to be affecting them more than HSU, HSU having addressed these difficult issues and decisions in previous years. Unlike other competitors, HSU is also in the fortunate position of receiving a small uplift in the Block Grant. Further to the previous discussion,

SF said she would be pleased if any surplus funds could be directed toward projects associated with alleviating student loneliness.

DB highlighted the new Terms of Reference and the renaming of the Committee to Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, as outlined in Paper 5. The Board approved the changes unanimously.

13. HSU Risk Register and HSU Health and Safety Policy

The Board received and noted current iterations of the Risk Register and Health and Safety Policy.

14. AOB

None noted.

Meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

<p>Next Meeting: Tuesday, 13th June at 4.00 pm (venue tbc)</p> <p><i>Dates for 2023/24 academic year tbc</i></p>
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